

# 1997 Session Report

2nd Legislative District

Representative  
■ Roger Bush



Committees:  
Children and Family Services  
— *vice chair*  
Government Reform and Land Use  
Energy and Utilities

Contact me:  
415 John L. O'Brien Bldg.  
P.O. Box 40600  
Olympia, WA 98504-0600  
(360) 786-7824



Dear Friends:

My first session representing you in Olympia turned out to be an extremely productive one. Many important issues were resolved, with perhaps our greatest success being that of welfare reform. After several years of trying, we finally have a sweeping welfare reform measure that requires greater personal accountability and time limits on benefits for able-bodied recipients.

For the first time in 20 years, the Legislature passed significant juvenile justice reform. We worked hard with the Senate and the governor to develop a bill that will bring many needed changes to the state's juvenile justice system.

We kept the growth in state government spending to its lowest level in 25 years, and we approved more than \$400 million in tax cuts, included a property tax referendum that could prevent an increase in the state property tax levy and limit increases in all nonvoter-approved levies.

We passed education reforms that emphasize teaching basic skills such as reading, writing and math to ensure that every student who graduates from Washington's public schools has the tools to succeed.

We achieved expansion of the Basic Health Plan to provide health care coverage for 8,000 additional low-income families.

And best of all, we did everything in 105 days. There was no need this time for a special session, the first time that's happened since 1957.

I want you to know how much I appreciate the honor of serving you in the Legislature. I certainly hope succeeding sessions will be as exciting and productive.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Roger Bush". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.  
Rep. Roger Bush

## The budget and education

With total spending of \$19.07 billion over the next two years, the new state operating budget represents an increase of 7.7 percent over the current level, more than \$100 million below the limit established by Initiative 601.

We kept our promise to make education the first budget priority. Funding for K-12 education is the largest budget item, about \$8.9 billion – an increase of more than 7 percent – and in addition, the new operating budget includes approximately \$2.2 billion for higher education.

We took a major step in improving the quality of higher education and access to our colleges and universities. We increased higher education enrollment by about 6,400, including 2,190 at the four-year institutions and 4,200 at community and technical colleges around the state where the greatest demand and need has been identified.

In addition, we continued support for workforce training programs at the two-year colleges to serve up to 7,200 individuals.

Republicans in the House were instrumental in obtaining an additional \$2.9 million for the University of Washington Tacoma campus. The Legislature proposed increasing budgeted enrollments for the Tacoma campus by nearly one-third by the end of the '97-'99 biennium, boosting the current level of 747 enrollees to 992!

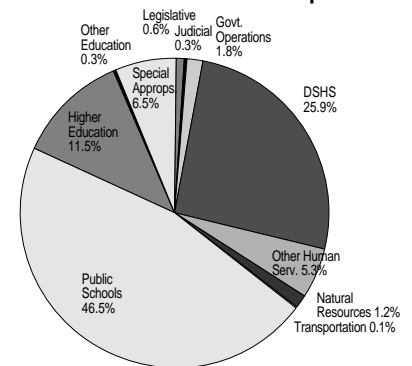
Another element in our efforts to make higher education more accessible to more people is increased student financial aid to help students from low- and middle-income families.

In K-12 education, we insisted on important policy changes to direct more resources into the classroom to improve student learning. We continued funding and improved the focus of

efforts to increase academic standards and performance.

We adopted legislation giving teachers authority to establish an "optimum learning atmosphere," by maintaining discipline in their classrooms. Teachers were given the management tools they needed to regain control of their classes and stop disruptive students from harming other students' ability to learn and help keep the gangs out of classrooms.

**1997-99 General Fund-State Expenditures**



**Welfare reform:** The Legislature and governor agreed on a reform plan that puts a five-year cap on benefits, compared to the unlimited benefits of today's system. Our plan will require people receiving benefits to work, seek employment, or perform specified work activities. Those who don't find work will undergo a skills and needs assessment and a plan will be developed to help them become self-sufficient and employed.

**Property tax relief:** We passed property tax relief and reform to save the owner of a \$110,000 home as much as \$23,000 over the life of a 30-year mortgage. Our plan also would provide protection from huge assessment increases and offer lasting protection for homeowners by setting a stricter limit on annual levy increases at all levels of government. In response to the governor's veto of this measure, we passed a referendum to let the public vote on the issue this fall.

**B&O tax relief:** We completed repeal of the massive business and occupation tax increases imposed in 1993. Some of the small-business people targeted for those increases saw their taxes rise 66 percent! Despite promises to support the B&O tax roll back, the governor refused to sign the repeal measure unless relief was delayed another year. The tax rollback now takes effect July 1, 1998.

## Voluntary intoxication defense ban

Time ran out in the session before the Senate could act on my bill banning voluntary intoxication as a defense in criminal cases. It not only addressed the issue of the slaughter on our highways by people who are intoxicated or on drugs, it involved those hidden crimes behind our front doors, in that court records show intoxication or drug use is often used as a defense in domestic abuse cases. House Bill 1672 had the backing of police organizations and county prosecutors, as well as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and victims' rights groups. With your continued support we will move forward to pass this important bill next session.

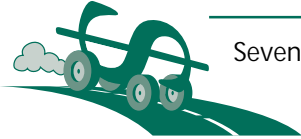
## Cleaner water, lower costs

Legislation I sponsored to help small water districts manage their resources better and lower costs while meeting state and federal clean water standards passed the House and Senate without a single negative vote before being signed by the governor. Puyallup's Valley Water District and residents in Alderwood Estates, Chinook, Bonney Lake's Winchester area and others served by the Valley Water District will be among those saving money as a result of tax relief provided by the bill. The bill is expected to help keep rates low, particularly for low-income and fixed-income residents of the state.

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## 2nd District Survey Results

On welfare reform you were asked how long a person should be eligible to receive benefits, and 92 percent said a five-year limit was sufficient. Also, 92 percent of you thought that cash benefit increases should be denied for additional children born to mothers on welfare.



Seventy-five percent of you agreed with the idea of re-directing that portion of the motor vehicle excise tax (24 percent) which now goes to the state General Fund to funding of transportation needs.

Seventy percent of those responding supported the plan passed by the Republican majorities in the House and Senate to limit property tax increases to either 106 percent of assessed value or the rate of inflation, whichever is lower.

Government reform was another issue that 2nd District citizens felt strongly about. Two-thirds of you said you would support a proposal to reduce the size of the Department of Social and Health Services by dividing its various responsibilities among several smaller agencies.



On Education, 54 percent of you said you would not support a "moderate" charter schools proposal, such as the one that surfaced during this session. Asked how you would spend available money for K-12 schools, your top priorities were: (1) books and supplies; (2) repair/restore existing schools; (3) reduce class size; (4) vocational education; and (5) improve libraries/upgrade resources. Concerning School Levies, I asked whether the local levy lid should be maintained at 24 percent or lowered, and only 21 percent of those responding supported maintaining it at 24 percent.

When asked what to do about the Growth Management Act (GMA), one-third of you wanted to abolish it or allow counties to opt out; 21 percent thought it should be revised and slightly less than one-third of you thought it should be kept intact.

### Flood victim aid

To help victims of the disastrous flooding of the past two or three years, we passed a bill easing recovery costs by providing sales and use tax exemptions on the purchase of labor, services and tangible personal property used to help repair or replace homes, businesses and private automobiles. After so many legislators had worked hard to help the people in our area, we were stunned by the governor's veto.

### Tax deferral for seniors

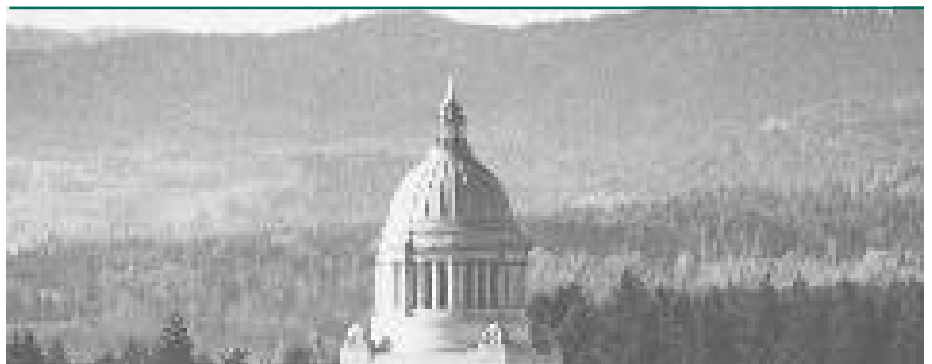
My seat mate in the House, Rep. Scott Smith, and I co-sponsored House Bill 1003, which strengthens the state property tax deferral program for senior citizens and disabled persons by expanding the deferral to all special tax assessments. This reform just reflects common sense, and will make the property tax system more convenient for both taxpayers and county officials.

On crime issues, I asked at what age minors should be tried in court as adults. The youngest age given as a choice - 12 years - and the oldest - 18 years - both drew the highest response - about 20 percent. Two-thirds of you said that persons convicted of second-degree burglary should get tougher sentences.



The Department of Fish and Wildlife asked for \$1 million to hire hunters and help control an anticipated 50 percent increase in problem animal complaints due to voters approval of Initiative 655, which made it illegal to hunt bears and cougars with dogs and baiting techniques.

Asked how to deal with the problem, more than two-thirds of you said I-655 should be amended and hunting volunteers recruited.



### Female veterans' memorial

The House unanimously approved an effort by Rep. Smith and myself to honor the 36,000 female veterans in our state who have served honorably in our armed services, but again the Senate ran out of time before the bill passed. House Bill 1683 would have appropriated \$50,000 to the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs as our state's share of the cost of building the Women in Military Service for America memorial project at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

Rep. Bush speaks out on the floor of the House regarding the merits of regulatory reform.



### Regulatory reform

We worked hard and won solid bipartisan support for a responsible regulatory reform bill, HB 1032, but the governor vetoed most of its provisions, including a section I successfully added creating a process for review of new state agency rules. My amendment called for rules to become ineffective in seven years unless evaluated on achieving

their goals, their conflict with or effect on other rules and actual costs, as well as any controversy or legal action's effects on them. Another regulatory reform measure, HB 1076, calls for the Department of Social and Health Services to meet most of the same requirements for making rules that apply to other state agencies. Thankfully, the governor saw the need for this bill and signed it into law.

*I hope you will continue to share your views with me by writing or calling my office. Letters should be addressed to Rep. Roger Bush, P.O. Box 40600, Olympia, WA 98504-0600 or you may call the toll-free legislative hotline, 1-800-562-6000.*